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SUBJECTIVE VALUES, OBJECTIVE WORLD

The Foundations of Austrian Economics From Menger to Mises: A Critico-Historical Retrospective of Subjectivism

Allen Oakley
Edward Elgar, 1997, x + 258 pgs.

Have another look at that subtitle. It suggests that readers of *Foundations of Austrian Economics* are in for a long haul, and I fear that expectation is correct. Professor Oakley writes in an almost impenetrable academic prose. You know at once that you are not browsing through H.L. Mencken's collected works.

But I can forgive Professor Oakley much. (I cannot and will not forgive his use of the barbarism "mitigate against.") Although he does "not like very much the free-market, 'survival-of-the-fittest' ideology that has become identified with most

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Austrian economists, and their literature" (p. ix), he thinks that Menger and Mises have made essential contributions to economic method. These he endeavors to describe, often in an illuminating fashion.

His admiration for the great Austrians is apparent; he refers, e.g., to "the genius of...Ludwig von Mises," grouping him in that category with Max Weber (p. 232). But he does not think that Menger and Mises were entirely successful. Though they grasped the importance of subjectivism, they failed to carry out their insights to the full extent possible. In this contention, as it seems to me, our author entirely fails.

As Professor Oakley sees matters, many economists have been beguiled by a *fata morgana*—formalism. They think that economics, to be a true science, must ape the methods of mathematical physics. Unfortunately for those who hold this view, the economy arises from the actions of human beings. And our species, among other faults, does not operate according to rigidly deterministic laws. Instead, human action is creative, and people respond freely to the world as they perceive it.

Correct economic method must start from human action, not differential equations.

Correct economic method, then, must start from human action, not differential equations. (You can see why Professor Oakley finds Mises congenial company.) In a phrase to which our author is much partial, neoclassical economists wrongly give precedence to epistemology over ontology. This is just a fancy way of making the point that mathematical physics isn't the appropriate model for economics.

It is the singular merit of Carl Menger, according to Professor Oakley, to have realized this vital truth. "Menger's ontology concerned itself primarily with phenomena that are generated by the deliberations, plans and actions of individual agents in that most fundamental of human preoccupations, the endeavor to satisfy material and other essential life needs and wants" (p. 54). (Well, I

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warned you that Oakley isn't Mencken.) Menger's stress upon the subjective point of view is all to the good, but his pioneering insight soon left him with a problem, at least according to Oakley. Menger also wished to develop economics as a rigorous science. Professor Oakley maintains that subjectivism and scientific rigor do not fit together well; since human action is creative, subjective, etc., it cannot be reduced to strict laws. At best, we can by empathy with others grasp how they might act in typical situations.

Menger, by failing to realize this, fell into error. Menger's "inconclusive and truncated treatment of his ontological insights into the nature and role of subjectivism and individualism meant that these principles were left only as guideposts for those who were to follow him" (p. 87). Alas, the blandishments of scientific rigor proved too much for our nascent subjectivist.

The economist can by insight and deduction grasp the essences of the human actions he studies.

I cannot think that Professor Oakley's complaint against Menger withstands scrutiny. Our author is of course right that mathematical methods that ignore causality are a poor way to study human action. But it does not follow from that alone that economics cannot be a rigorous science. For Oakley's conclusion to follow validly, he needs the additional premise that the mathematical method he challenges is essential to science. Why not a rigorously developed study of human action that is non-mathematical? The considerations advanced by Professor Oakley leave this possibility entirely open.

Just the path indicated was taken by Menger, a fact of which Oakley is well aware. As an Aristotelian in good standing, Menger held that a true scientist can discern real necessities in nature. Applied to our discipline, the economist can by insight and deduction grasp the essences of the human actions he studies. By doing so, the economist can achieve "an exact orientation that has as its aim 'the determination of strict laws of phenomena'" (p. 81). There we have it: scientific rigor without mathematics. Menger has escaped the dilemma in which Oakley has attempted to imprison him.

Our author is not convinced—you didn't think he would be, did you? He raises an objection to Menger's method that, as far as I can decipher it, amounts to this. Menger cannot show that "hidden variables" do not account for the phenomenon he professes to explain. And even if

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he could, in a given case, show this, he has not excluded the possibility that something else can cause the phenomenon in other cases.

The first part of Oakley's objection against Menger begs the question. Menger claims to find causal necessities in human action. Oakley answers that he may have overlooked hidden variables. Well, if Menger is right, he didn't. All Oakley's comment amounts to is the triviality that Menger's claim may be wrong.

A similar response applies to the remainder of Oakley's objection. If Menger says that only certain causes produce a given effect, but something else can also produce it, then he is wrong. But the mere unsupported claim that it is always possible that something else can produce the effect has by itself no force. Again, all that Oakley is saying is that maybe Menger is wrong. This is not much of an objection.

I shall pass over without extensive comment those chapters that Oakley devotes to Dilthey, Rickert, and Weber. According to our author, Menger might have advanced even further in his study of subjectivism had he known of Dilthey's insights. But as to the nature of these insights, I can make neither hide nor hair. Suffice it to say that Dilthey was a pioneer in hermeneutic philosophy. *Verbum sat sapientiae!* The mysteries of Heinrich Rickert I shall leave for others to fathom.

Fortunately, Professor Oakley descends to earth and favors us with an informative chapter on Mises. He gives an excellent account of Mises's concept of human action and praises him for his development of subjectivism beyond the point at which Menger had left matters. He singles out one of Mises's insights for special commendation: "It is evident that Mises understood much about the import of time for action and its implications for the empirico-historical human sciences" (p. 203).

"It is evident that Mises understood much about the import of time for action and its implications for the empirico-historical human sciences."

But, as with Menger, our author is not fully satisfied with Mises. Again, an Austrian pioneer has failed fully to emancipate himself from scientism. Mises tried to deduce logically a science of praxeology from the axiom of human action. He did not fully realize that the theorems of this science cannot apply completely to particular human actions, since these are "contingent."

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Once more, the objection amounts to very little. To say that human actions are contingent, in a sense that defeats praxeology, is just to assume without argument that Mises is wrong. If Mises has derived his theorems properly, then human action is not fully contingent; Oakley has given this term no content other than "not amenable to deductive explanation."

We can say of Oakley what he says of Menger and Mises: his work is valuable but flawed.

Further, although Oakley rightly discerns neo-Kantian influences on Mises's thought, he wrongly thinks it follows from this influence that Mises considered praxeology a construction rather than part of the real world. The real world that concerns economists is the world to which the categories have been applied. Even if Mises holds, in his neo-Kantian moods, that praxeology depends on a grid of humanly imposed categories, its results are real enough. Professor Oakley also misunderstands a passage in which Mises calls equilibrium an "imaginary construction." His thinking this does not gainsay the fact that praxeology applies with perfect exactitude to the real world.

In sum, we can say of Oakley what he says of Menger and Mises: his work is valuable but flawed. ◗

THE TROPES OF TRUTH

Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air

Francis J. Beckwith and
Gregory Koukl
Baker Books, 1998, 189 pgs.

Part of the fun of studying philosophy is that it is a very difficult, technical subject. If you know the meaning of "rigid designator," the "inscrutability of reference," and the "private-language argument," you can gloat in your presumed superiority to those who have no inkling of the complexities these phrases suggest.

In their fascination with the arcane, philosophers often lose sight of the fact that their discipline has the utmost practical relevance. The authors of *Relativism* do not fall into this mistake. Rather than addressing professional philosophers, they write with a popular audience in mind. They aim to show that false ideas about the relativity of truth foster moral and political errors.

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Their case against moral relativism begins with a definition. "Subjective truths are based on internal references and change according to our whims. Objective truths, in contrast, are realities in the external world that we discover and cannot be changed by our internal feelings" (p. 28). Moral relativism holds that ethical truth is subjective in this sense. "Ethical truths depend on the individuals or groups who hold them" (p. 28).

Our authors distinguish three varieties of relativism. The first of these, Society Does Relativism, points to the wide variety of customs among cultures as a reason to deny moral objectivity. The Aztecs sacrificed human beings to their gods; who are we to stigmatize them as immoral? "Since each culture has a different morality, none is justified in claiming that its own brand of morality is correct" (p. 37).

As if this were not bad enough, Society Says Relativism goes further. It maintains that an individual ought to act as the rules of the society in which he lives dictate. Society Does Relativism does not do this; it merely describes the morality of different groups.

But there is one doctrine yet more extreme. I Say Relativism reduces morality entirely to the preferences of the individual. "What is right for one person isn't necessarily right for another person, regardless of the culture in which they live" (p. 38).

The authors aim to show that false ideas about the relativity of truth foster moral and political errors.

Relativist thoughts are very much in the air, as some of the comments on the recent difficulties of our Beloved Leader indicate. "Who are we to judge the president's private behavior?" "Maybe Bill and Hillary have an understanding. Doesn't this, if so, make the president's actions all right?" Comments of this kind illustrate the revolt against fixed standards which our authors wish to challenge.

In their view, all three varieties of relativism are demonstrably false. Against William Graham Sumner,

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who appealed in *Folkways* to differences among societies to support Society Does Relativism, they make a commonsense point: "Just because cultures differ on moral viewpoints doesn't mean objective moral truth is a fiction" (p. 46). From the fact that the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice, it does not follow that they were right to do so.

Indeed it does not, but this point does not refute Sumner; it merely notes that he has failed to make good his case. (Incidentally, Sumner held strong views as to what was correct moral behavior in his own society. He was the author of the libertarian classic *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*.)

Our authors, alive to this point, endeavor to go further. "Sumner's view, however, is self-refuting. In order for him to conclude that all moral claims are an illusion, he must first escape the illusion himself. He must have a full and accurate view of the entire picture.... Such a privileged view is precisely what Sumner denies. Objective assessments are illusions, he claims, but then he offers his own 'objective' assessment" (p. 48).

This argument does not succeed. Someone, like Sumner, who denies that moral truth transcends culture is not himself advancing a moral doctrine. Rather, he is making a point about moral doctrines. Sumner may well be wrong, but he is not contradictory.

Oddly enough, Society Says Relativism does fall before a variant of the self-contradiction argument. According to that view, you should adopt a moral rule only if your society holds it. If so, then you should hold this very position only if your society holds it; it says that people *should* conform to the rules of their group. And most societies conspicuously do not; they condemn other groups for failing to accept their standards.

Beckwith and Koukl do not raise this point. Instead they offer a wide range of other difficulties, some more successful than others, designed to undermine this type of relativism. They argue, wrongly as it seems to me, that you cannot criticize the practices of your own society if you accept Society Says Relativism. Does this not by itself suffice to overthrow the doctrine? For surely we can and do criticize our own society.

> In the authors' view, all three varieties of relativism are demonstrably false.

But I think this goes too fast. Society Says Relativism allows us to criticize a society for failing to meet its own standards. And often social criticism proceeds in just this way. For example, one might criticize abortion

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by alleging its similarity to infanticide, a practice condemned in our own society.

The weakness of this argument does not show, and I do not for a moment believe, that Society Says Relativism is true. Readers will derive much pleasure and profit from going over in detail the authors' many points against it.

Rather than praise them for their insight, I shall instead (as you would expect) consider another difficulty with one of their claims. They equate I Say Relativism, the view that morality is relative to the individual, with doing whatever you wish. How, they ask, can an I Say relativist hold himself obligated to keep a promise if he no longer wishes to do so? I should have thought the answer obvious: Keeping the promise may be a rule he himself holds valid. The authors might respond by claiming that if the relativist breaks his promise, he by that fact shows he has adopted a new rule; but there seems little reason to adopt this suggestion.

The view that personal autonomy is in some cases an overriding good need not be based on moral relativism.

As our authors abundantly show, the issue of relativism affects many essential political controversies. Like Richard Neuhaus and his *First Things* associates, Beckwith and Koukl take on *Romer v. Evans*, the Supreme Court decision that overturned a Colorado constitutional amendment banning the inclusion of homosexuals within antidiscrimination laws. They point out the relativist basis of the Court's decision.

"The philosophical ground for this reasoning [of the Court]...is that personal subjective relativism and absolute autonomy are the primary bases for deciding moral issues that touch on public policy. Therefore any legislation that presupposes a notion of what is morally good cannot be rational" (p. 113). This being so, the Colorado statute was in the Court's view based on animus against homosexuals and could not survive strict constitutional scrutiny.

Once more I have a bone to pick. The view that personal autonomy is in some cases an overriding good need not be based on moral relativism. One might hold it objectively true that autonomy is to be respected. This point our authors sometimes recognize but elsewhere neglect.

Rather than pursue the point further, though, I shall conclude by enthusiastic agreement with two other points Beckwith and Koukl raise. They rightly note that although autonomy is often praised, it is seldom defended by

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argument. Why is autonomy the supreme value? We are rarely told.

The authors also pose a devastating challenge to another often used tactic of moral evasion. Given widespread public disagreement over issues such as abortion and euthanasia, the Supreme Court, it is often alleged, must decide according to "neutral" constitutional principles.

Thus, in *Roe v. Wade*, Justice Blackmun held that since experts disagree on when the fetus becomes human, the State cannot adopt as its own a controversial moral position on the issue. But such a decision, the authors note, cannot be escaped. "The Court may have denied taking sides verbally, but the practical effect of its opinion is that the fetus in our society is not a human person worthy of protection" (p. 138).

Relativism is not always in my view right, but it is always worth grappling with.

Relativism is not always in my view right; but it is always worth grappling with. Readers interested in seeing how philosophy affects public affairs will find this book a valuable guide. ◗

TILTING AT THE REGIME

The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics

Richard John Neuhaus, et al. Spence Publishing, 1997, xiii + 289 pgs.

In November 1996, the journal *First Things* published a symposium that sharply criticized recent federal court decisions on abortion, euthanasia, and homosexual rights. Decisions such as *Romer v. Evans,* in which the Supreme Court struck down a Colorado constitutional amendment it judged anti-gay, throw into question the legitimacy of the United States "regime." Faced with rulings that blatantly disregard moral law and majority opinion, what are decent Americans—i.e., people like us—to do? Should we begin to contemplate civil disobedience?

Attacks on the Supreme Court are a staple of the contemporary Right, and a normal reader of the symposium would have encountered little to surprise him. Among conservatives, a challenge to the federal courts is about as controversial as a campaign against rabies; and the

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aforementioned "normal reader" might have expected little more reaction to the issue than a few letters to the editor.

Our imagined reader would have left out of account one group—the neoconservatives. Walter Berns, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Peter Berger, *et hoc genus omne*, at once severed their connections with the journal. What neocon in good standing could bear to think for a moment of actually doing something about the Supreme Court?

The End of Democracy reprints the original symposium, the anguished letters of protest, and comments by writers in *Commentary, National Review, Chronicles,* and *The New Republic*. It concludes with "An Anatomy of a Controversy," an essay of nearly one hundred pages by *First Things'* voluble editor, Father Richard Neuhaus. The reissue of the symposium in its present expanded form gives me a welcome excuse to assault both sides in the controversy.

Not, of course, in equal measure. The original symposiasts raised some valuable points. Their criticism of the federal courts rests on two principal charges, held together in a very uneasy balance. On the one hand, several recent decisions of the courts strike at the heart of the moral law. Professor Robert George of Princeton states: "If the moral law is anything like what Christians and Jews have long supposed it to be, then there are profoundly important respects in which the institutions of American democracy—particularly the courts—have made themselves its enemy.... The judicial movement

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toward euthanasia makes it plain that the hour is late. The 'culture of death' is well-advanced in our nation" (pp. 57, 61).

A decision that especially galls religious conservatives, such as Professor George and Professor Russell Hittinger, is *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*. Not only did the Court contravene the moral law, it set up a new principle to stand in its place. "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life" (p. 21, quoting from Casey). Because people are autonomous in this sense, a woman's right to abortion cannot be seriously restricted by the states. But if everyone is to be the author of his own moral law, as the Court appears to mandate, are we not left in confusion? Can the Court offer us autonomous selves no guidance?

The legitimacy of our political system rests on a strict construction: not of the Constitution, but of prior Supreme Court decisions.

Our federal overlords have not left us entirely at sea, but their generous proffer of assistance does not win the approval of our symposiasts. The Supreme Court, in Casey, acknowledged that the reasoning of *Roe v. Wade*, the notorious case that first upheld a right to abortion, was eminently questionable. But it could not at this late date be overturned.

The legitimacy of our political system, according to the Court, rests on a strict construction: not of the Constitution, but of prior Supreme Court decisions. Professor Hittinger explains the Court's argument: "To these who cannot agree with the proposition that individuals have a moral or constitutional right to kill the unborn...the Court urged acceptance out of respect for the rule of law. 'If the Court's legitimacy should be undermined,' the Court declared, 'then so would the country be in its very ability to see itself through its constitutional ideals'" (p. 18).

In brief, then, according to the first line of criticism, the Court violates the moral law, substituting for it an amalgam of personal autonomy and its own commands. On the other hand, the symposiasts attack the Court for lack of deference to democracy. Robert Bork especially insists on this point. "Romer is a prime instance of 'constitutional law' made by sentiment having nothing to do with the Constitution. What can explain the Court majority's decision? Only the newly faddish approval of homosexual conduct among the elite classes from which

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the justices come and to which most of them respond" (p. 12). The Court does not feel bound to respect the "redneck bigotry" of the majority.

We can easily see that the two types of criticism of the Court need not be compatible. "Imagine that abortion in the United States," Peter Berger suggests, "had achieved its present legal status through an act of Congress rather than a Supreme Court decision. Imagine further that the Supreme Court had then ruled this act to be unconstitutional" (p. 72). Those, such as George and Hittinger, who defend the moral law would applaud the Court, while majority-rulers like Bork would be outraged. Which criticism, if either, is right?

The Constitution is a specific legal document, granting a few limited powers to the national government, and reserving the rest to the states.

The moral case against abortion and euthanasia mounted by George, Hittinger, and their associates seems to be strong, but the direct relevance of this moral argument to constitutional law is not at once apparent. The Constitution is a specific legal document, granting a few limited powers to the national government, and reserving the rest to the states. Neither the Court nor Congress has the power to formulate abortion policy, since this issue is not assigned to the national sphere. Though abortion may well be morally wrong, this does not decide the constitutional issue.

"What?" we may imagine Professor George saying. "Is *The Mises Review* also among the moral nihilists?" Not at all. Once more, it does not follow from the existence of the moral law that every governmental body is mandated to enforce all its provisions. A parallel at once springs to mind. From the fact that slavery is morally wrong it does not follow that a policy of national coercion directed against the "peculiar institution" was constitutional. This, I fear, is a point that Father Neuhaus has not grasped.

Neuhaus cites with apparent sympathy the view of Harry Jaffa "that the Declaration [of Independence] is an organic part of our constitutional order, a position also favored, of course by Abraham Lincoln" (p. 253). Surely the direct incorporation of "the law of nature and of nature's God" into the "constitutional order" would radically empower the central government, as it acted to enforce its interpretation of that law. I should have thought the usurpation of power by Lincoln during the Civil War, under the cloak of a crusade to preserve a

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nation "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," sufficient evidence of this point. "But," our persistent objector may go on, "you haven't fully responded to the charge of moral nihilism. Suppose that you are right—the Constitution does not give the federal government a blank check to enforce the moral law. Aren't you then saying that if a state passed a bill allowing abortion, the Supreme Court should not, *pace* Father Neuhaus, strike it down?"

I am indeed saying that; the fourteenth amendment, to which Neuhaus appeals, was illegally adopted and completely destroyed the federal-state balance of the original Constitution. Properly, no branch of the federal government has jurisdiction over state laws on abortion. But to say this is far from a surrender to moral nihilism. An association of independent states for specific purposes, as the United States was originally designed to be, seems entirely consistent with moral law. Those convinced that abortion and euthanasia are wrong must act at the state level; they must not, like Lincoln, advance the cause of Leviathan for moral ends, real or supposed.

An association of independent states, as the United States was originally designed to be, seems consistent with moral law.

I find myself also unable unreservedly to endorse the other principal line of criticism advanced by the symposiasts. Mr. Bork rightly says that the Court has substituted its own elitist values for the views of the majority. But the Constitution nowhere enacts government by the majority. More successful is Bork's appeal to the "original understanding" of the Constitution; he notes the obvious point that rights to abortion and euthanasia are not mentioned in that document.

But our eminent jurist has himself an etiolated grasp of "original understanding." In particular, he fails to grasp that the Constitution was created by the states and that the power of Congress and the President, not only the Supreme Court, is strictly limited. Thus, he writes, "the Taney Court that decided *Dred Scott* might well have decided, if the issue had been presented to it, that the South had a constitutional right to secede. Would Lincoln have been wrong to defy the Court's order and continue the Civil War?" (p. 17). Of course the correct answer is yes.

If we cannot accept in its entirety the case of the *First Things* "theocrats," one must at least admire their evident

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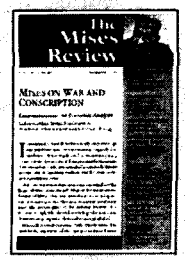
concern with moral principles. The same cannot be said of their neoconservative antagonists. As soon as the least suggestion of disobedience to the Court is advanced, Podhoretz, Decter, and Co. jump ship.

We might at first wonder why: they themselves have often excoriated the Court; and the neoconservative William Kristol shows himself in the present collection a firm opponent of abortion. If they oppose the Court, why do they scurry to disassociate themselves from Father Neuhaus's journal?

Samuel Francis hits the nail on the head in his analysis of the controversy. The neocons do not oppose the present order of things in any fundamental way. Instead, they wish merely to grab power for themselves. Any attempt to call into question the basis of the United States government is then strictly *verboten*. Francis states: "Neo-conservatism is thus fundamentally a defense of the status quo, a political formula with which the dominant left can be content because it does not seriously challenge the premises and power structure that the left has constructed and uses for its own hegemony" (p. 134). ◗



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THE HEGEMONIC IMPERATIVE

The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives

Zbigniew Brzezinski
Basic Books, 1997, xiv + 223 pgs.

Professor Brzezinski displays in this book an inordinate fondness for intellectual games. A minor and forgivable weakness, you might think. But unfortunately the games our author proposes to play put at risk the lives of millions of Americans.

Our eminent author, the former security advisor to President Jimmy Carter, that jellyfish of strength, finds America faced with a unique opportunity. Great empires have existed throughout history: the Roman, the Chinese, the Mongol, the British. But never before now has a country been in a position to dominate the entire

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world. "The collapse of its rival [the U.S.S.R.] left the United States in a unique position. It became simultaneously the first and only truly global power" (p. 11).

The key to world supremacy, Brzezinski holds, lies in control of the Eurasian continent. "Until recently, the leading analysts of geopolitics have debated whether land power was more significant than sea power and what specific region of Eurasia is vital to gain control over the entire continent. One of the most prominent, Harold Mackinder, pioneered the discussion early in this century with his successive concepts of the Eurasian 'pivot areas'...and, later, of the Central–East European 'heartland' as the pivotal springboards for the attainment of continental domination" (p. 38).

The key to world supremacy, the author holds, lies in control of the Eurasian continent.

But we have now gone beyond Mackinder. The issues that confront us are no longer land *or* sea power. No longer can we be concerned only with control over a mere part of Eurasia. A truly global power must dominate the entire Eurasian continent. (Incidentally, our Great Global Thinker has not managed to get right the first name of his predecessor in World Chess. It was "Halford" not "Harold." Alas, I fear that I am a mere scholiast, unfit to inhabit the Olympian heights where Brzezinski dwells.)

An obvious difficulty in our author's argument must have long since occurred to most readers. How can Brzezinski claim both that the United States is the only global superpower and that the key to global power is control of Eurasia? America holds no territory on the European continent.

Such an elementary point has of course dawned on our Strategic Thinker, and he has a ready reply. Control need not mean physical occupation. The United States holds strong salients on the peripheries of both Europe and Asia: in Europe, through the Nato Alliance, and in Asia, through our alliance with Japan. By extension of Nato and cultivation of the Japanese connection, together with a *modus vivendi* with China, United States dominance over Eurasia can be secured for at least the near future.

I have sometimes spoken slightingly of our Great Thinker, but I do not mean to underestimate him. He is a theorist of striking ingenuity. In each region of the world he considers, he builds his case like a grandmaster at

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chess. If Turkestan does this, then we must do that, unless of course Russia does so-and-so, in which case, we must do the following in Poland and Germany...etc. I cannot convey in brief compass the intricacy of his discussion, but one fact stands out. Although the Cold War has officially ended, Professor Brzezinski fears a Russian revival.

"The post-Soviet Russian elite had apparently also expected that the West would not aid in, or at least not impede, the restoration of a central Russian role in the post-Soviet space," our author writes. "They thus resented the West's willingness to help the newly independent states consolidate their separate political existence" (p. 103). Even those Russians inclined to friendship with the West have not reconciled themselves to the loss of the Ukraine. Such revanchism must be firmly resisted: a place in the American Empire is however reserved for Russia should she see reason and knuckle under.

Though Professor Brzezinski is alive to every nuance in what he pompously calls the geostrategic situation, one question gets no more than a moment's attention from him–and it is the most vital question of all. Why should the United States bother with global hegemony? Do we not, on his own showing, risk conflicts with others by pursuit of a global strategy? The situation in Korea, e.g., is in our author's account one that requires delicate balancing, lest struggle with China erupt. And even if we avoid conflict, do not our commitments cost us billions of dollars? Why, for instance, should we assume most of the defense burden of Japan? Because of our umbrella of protection, Japan need devote only a minute portion of its budget to defense. Wouldn't we likewise be better off with lower spending for military commitments to others?

Why should the United States bother with global hegemony?

Important questions, you might think; but Brzezinski's defense of global hegemony is confined to a brief statement: "Short of a deliberate or unintentional American abdication, the only real alternative to American global leadership in the foreseeable future is international anarchy. In that respect, it is correct to assert that America has become, as President Clinton put it, the world's 'indispensable nation'" (p. 195).

The good professor's "argument" is no more than a crude verbal trick. By "international anarchy" he means nothing more than a system of states not controlled by a hegemonic power or otherwise unified. Since no other

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country has sufficient power to assume global control, then if we set aside the imperial purple, by definition a state of anarchy remains.

But why is this bad? Professor Brzezinski does not reveal to us the secret. He does refer to various problems, such as population explosion and "poverty-driven migration," but it is not clear why American hegemony is needed to cope with them. One strongly suspects that for our author, the pursuit of global power is its own justification.

Those content with less demanding goals for United States policy have no reason to pursue hegemony.

Those content with less demanding goals for United States policy, such as protection against foreign attacks, have no reason to pursue hegemony and every reason to resume our traditional policy of nonintervention in European affairs. The two major countries most likely to be hostile to the United States in the near future are of course our old Cold War friends Russia and China. Neither, as our author makes clear, is in a position to damage our interests.

Owing to the collapse of the Soviet Union, "Russia's international status was significantly degraded, with one of the world's two superpowers now viewed by many as little more than a Third World regional power....The geopolitical void was magnified by the scale of Russia's social crisis. Three-quarters of a century of Communist rule had inflicted unprecedented biological damage on the Russian people" (p. 89).

But what of China? Is not this rising and dynamic power the Achilles heel of isolationism? If we do not contain her power or, better, ally with her, will not China pose a grave threat to United States security? Although the Chinese rate of economic growth has been of late spectacular, there is little reason to expect this to continue. And even if she sustained her growth rate over the next twenty-five years, "China would still be relatively very poor. Even a tripling of GDP would leave China's population in the lower ranks of the world's nations in per capita income.... [E]ven by the year 2020, it is quite unlikely even under the best of circumstances that China could become truly competitive in the key dimensions of global power" (pp. 163–64).

Let us leave Professor Brzezinski to his grand global chessboard. The rest of us can be content with a slight modification of Washington's Farewell Address: the affairs of Eurasia do not concern the United States. ◗

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WHY MONO-CULTURALISM?

Liberal Racism

Jim Sleeper
Penguin Books, [1997] 1998,
195 pgs.

This, I am afraid, is an almost perfectly useless book. Its main thesis may be stated quite simply. White liberals have abandoned the true goals of the civil rights movement—joint participation by whites and blacks in a common American culture. Instead, liberals pander to black nationalists and separatists. Our author does not think that blacks (or for that matter white ethnics) should abandon all interest in their separate racial identity. But blackness must be strictly subordinate to a common national culture. "The best way to dissolve these hypocrisies (of white support for black separatism) is to reaffirm the two-tiered American civic faith the early civil rights movement mobilized so well. It synthesized parochial black communalism and strong universalism to strengthen an American civic culture.... At its best, the American civic culture and civic religion have shown the world how to balance parochial loyalties with cosmopolitan opportunities and commitments" (p. 147).

Mr. Sleeper's thesis is, I hope, sufficiently clear. One would expect him, having advanced his contention, to argue for it. Why should blacks subordinate their race to the common civic culture? Why should whites not react to blacks primarily as members of a different race?

In fact, he does not do so. Instead, he endlessly reiterates his thesis: both races should subordinate ethnic differences to common national identity. In questioning our author, I do not mean to deny his claim; I do not contend that either blacks or whites should emphasize race more than Sleeper deems appropriate. Rather, it is Sleeper's responsibility to advance some arguments for his view; otherwise his contention has only biographical interest.

It is the author's responsibility to advance some arguments for his view; otherwise his contention has only biographical interest.

The closest Mr. Sleeper comes to an argument is in his fifth chapter, "Way Out of Africa." Much black

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separatist rhetoric emphasizes the cultural heritage of American blacks from Africa. But a great deal of this alleged heritage consists of factually untrue claims. American blacks have few or no traceable ties with Africa, and it is a good thing that they do not. The "precolonial forebears" of today's Africans "enslaved and sold millions of people to the whites who transported them here. This is not hyperbolic; it is a reality which it takes hyperbole to deny" (p. 102). The most popular attempt to trace a connection between American blacks and Africa, Alex Haley's *Roots*, relied crucially on fabrication. Further, the few American blacks who visit Africa usually encounter empty stares or outright hostility.

Mr. Sleeper's chapter is, at least by his own book's standards, well presented and argued; but I cannot think that its contentions are decisive. Mass movements are very often founded on myths; has not our author read Georges Sorel or, for that matter, Franz Fanon? For our author myths are "rickety" and "irrational"; but why must others share this perspective? Once more Mr. Sleeper does not tell us.

The cool reception that American blacks encounter in Africa also has no great significance. Few American Jews settle in Israel, but this has not prevented Zionism from being of importance to the Jewish population of the United States. In fairness to Mr. Sleeper, most American Jews who visit Israel are well received, so the cases are in this respect not parallel. But the fact that many more Jews support Israel than visit it tells strongly against the importance of Mr. Sleeper's tales of woe. Even if American blacks are not welcomed in Africa, why may not an American black nationalist movement flourish? And why does a black nationalist movement have to depend on an African premise at all? Couldn't a black separatist accept all Mr. Sleeper's views on Africa, yet still reject integration? Once more I caution against misunderstanding. I do not advocate black nationalism; I wish merely to question the cogency of Mr. Sleeper's case against it.

The most popular attempt to trace a connection between American blacks and Africa relied crucially on fabrication.

It transpires, as the book goes on, that the two-tiered system involves less than meets the eye. Far from maintaining places for both ethnic and national solidarity, our author wishes radically to downplay the

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importance of race. He states: "[W]e should work harder to shake the false notion, propagated by the foundations and the media, that we would have little to give one another if color had no more cultural value than aesthetic preferences for brown eyes or green eyes" (p. 179). One "tier" in

The author wishes radically to downplay the importance of race.

Mr. Sleeper's system seems very much in abeyance.

There is yet another gap in our author's presentation. He celebrates "American civic culture"; but he says little about the nature of this wonderful entity. One gathers it consists largely of coalitions between liberals and labor to block the "excesses" of the free market.

Though I have greeted Mr. Sleeper's contribution to racial harmony with a not altogether warm reception, I do not wish to end on a negative note. I am a generous soul and I have been able to locate something good in the book. Our author criticizes affirmative action with considerable skill. "When even an organization as hell-bent on achieving diversity as the [New York] *Times* finds itself hitting a wall in minority hiring, it is time to realize that while all employees can and must stop perpetrating racist damage, few can repair the damage already done. Neither a factory nor a college can turn itself into a remediation center; nor can a newspaper become a therapy group" (p. 88). Mr. Sleeper deserves congratulations; his book contains an insightful paragraph. ◗

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE IQ DEBATE

Why Race Matters: Race Differences and What They Mean

Michael Levin

Praeger, 1997, xi + 415 pgs.

Michael Levin has gotten himself into enormous trouble with his fellow philosophers by adhering to a standard maxim in the philosophy of science. Levin's trouble starts when he rejects a common explanation for a widely recognized, and deplored, social phenomenon: the social and economic inequality of the races in American society. Levin's

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rejection of the conventional account would be sufficient in itself to embroil him in controversy. But, as a good philosopher of science, he has taken a further step; and it is this that has led his liberal colleagues to throw up their hands in horror.

To show that a theory cannot withstand counterexamples often is enough to eliminate it.

In empirical science, to find problems for a theory usually does not suffice to overthrow it. You must come up with an alternative account that better explains the data. Thus, astronomers long knew the severe difficulties of the Ptolemaic account. But they did not reject it until the competing Copernican theory arrived on the scene. (Matters differ in philosophy, where to show that a theory cannot withstand counterexamples often is enough to eliminate it.)

Unkind readers may dismiss the foregoing as typical philosopher's hairsplitting, but its practical importance cannot be gainsaid. Our author begins from some widely acknowledged demographic facts about American blacks. As conventional leftist opinion has it, precisely these facts mandate extensive affirmative action programs. The sorry social facts in question arise from discrimination and oppression, both past and present.

Professor Levin dissents. Discrimination against blacks, says Levin, does not explain their problems. What does? It is here that our author goes beyond other authors such as Thomas Sowell, who also rejects the discrimination view. Levin claims that genetic factors lie at the heart of disparities in income and performance.

As befits an outstanding analytic philosopher, Levin responds with care and imagination to objections to his contentions. One instance from his long discussion must here stand good for the rest. Stephen J. Gould, a Harvard paleontologist of Marxist leanings, has in *The Mismeasure of Man* argued that a general intelligence factor, called "g" by its proponents, is a scientific myth. The g-factor, Gould maintains, should not be reified; it is a mere artifact of statistics. It has been extracted through a disputable method called "factor analysis."

Levin readily acknowledges that the derivation of g depends on a particular method of analysis. But this by itself shows little: "all Gould actually shows, claims to have shown, or can show is that—what no one would deny—the reality of g is not logically guaranteed by its factorial extraction" (p. 53). A scientific theory need not

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exclude its rivals as logically impossible. We may rightfully accept it should it allow us to tie together a wide and varied set of facts.

Given the radical nature of Professor Levin's conclusions, the question of course arises: Is he correct? I shall say only this. Anyone who proposes to challenge Levin had better be well versed in statistics, intelligence testing, and evolutionary biology, all of which our author appears to have mastered. I venture to suggest that the so-called Flynn effect poses the sharpest challenge to our author's case. The mean IQ of Western populations has risen over the past sixty years, but surely people are not more intelligent than their parents and grandparents. Does this not suggest that IQ tests do not adequately measure intelligence? I shall leave it to readers to judge the adequacy of our author's ingenious answer (pp. 128 ff).

Does not the very attempt to suggest that racial differences may be politically relevant strike at the essence of libertarianism? Should not each individual be judged on his own merits? Levin himself is a thoroughgoing libertarian; and as he sees matters, his conclusions about race support rather than contravene his politics. Americans today find themselves confronted with all manner of affirmative action programs. Blacks, it is alleged, must receive special benefits in education, employment, and housing to compensate them for the malign effects of past oppression.

These programs interfere in drastic fashion with the free market; but, faced with the claim of justice, what is a classical liberal to do? He cannot combat these programs unless he challenges their root assumption—the view that blacks' social problems stem from the unjust treatment accorded them. Unless the premise is overthrown, a classical liberal must allow, on grounds of justice, interferences with the social order he favors. (One might, I suppose, claim that the affirmative action proposals, even lacking a rationale in justice, are consistent with classical liberalism; but most advocates of these programs have, no doubt wisely, declined to tread this path.)

Americans today find themselves confronted with all manner of affirmative action programs.

One might here object that even the need to combat affirmative action does not justify Levin's resort to race. Is it not possible to counter the claims of its supporters in some less

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controversial way? In a passage crucial to the book's case, Levin denies this: "[W]hy raise the contentious genetic issue at all? It must be raised because it is widely, and reasonably, assumed that among environmental factors, only oppression can produce an attainment gap as large as the one between the races.... Once environmentalism is accepted, the compensation argument returns at one remove: superior ability may give whites an advantage but, the cause of the superiority was a wrong, a wrong that must be annulled" (pp. 271–72).

Whether Levin's contention is correct will, one imagines, be subject to strong challenge by supporters, in the style of Thomas Sowell, of the cultural account of the black-white gap. In any event, our author is not yet done with the compensation principle. He shows that even if one accepts the principle that blacks merit recompense, it is a task of surpassing difficulty to arrive at an acceptable compensation principle.

But, once more, to Levin these problems are of secondary significance. Unless one asks whether the race gap stems from white misdeeds, one has not penetrated to the essence. "Taking the origin of the race gap as the heart of the matter explains why criticisms of preference that do not reach that issue, however forceful they may be on their own terms, are dismissed as picky, legalistic, and irrelevant" (p. 251).

Although Levin's case is carefully argued, I suspect that most of his colleagues will ignore this book. But even for those in the grip of egalitarian prejudices, to do so is a serious mistake. Levin has poured into his book a large number of stimulating ideas on many vexed philosophical questions.

Does not the very attempt to suggest that racial differences may be politically relevant strike at the essence of libertarianism?

Most notably, he offers the best noncognitivist account of moral values that I have read. In his view, values are not objective properties, that we intuit, as states of affairs; they are the results of biological adaptation. People do indeed believe their values to be objectively correct; but their belief is a conceptual blind spot. We must, if Levin is right, entertain at the time of action a false belief in value-objectivity at the time of action. Ingenious, no doubt; but is it not an advantage of the intuitionist theories Levin rejects that in them people are not saddled with inescapable false beliefs? But of course

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intuitionist theories have their own problems, a fact Levin is not slow to point out.

And can an appeal to the evolutionary advantages of cooperation give us the Kantian principle of morality Levin endorses? Why would evolution favor cooperative behavior with all human beings rather than only with members of one's own group? I must admit, though, that Darwin himself is here on Levin's side. In *The Descent of Man*, he claims that the extension of cooperation beyond the bounds of one's own tribe is the result of a simple inference.

Also not to be missed are Levin's note about Quine on the indeterminacy of translation (p. 80) and his refutation of John Rawls's argument that choosers in the original position would not try to maximize average expected utility (p. 289). One finishes *Why Race Matters* admiring both the author's courage and his immense technical virtuosity. ◗

By his tortured justification of our highest court, the author succeeds, against his intention, in showing that the Court is bankrupt.

MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

"Is Affirmative Action Doomed?"

Ronald Dworkin
The New York Review of Books,
Vol. XLV, No. 17, November 5,
1998, pp. 56–61

Conservatives, at least since the "Impeach Earl Warren" days, have viewed the Supreme Court with less than full enthusiasm. Are we too critical? Surely the Court cannot have butchered the Constitution to the extent its most vehement critics allege.

Professor Ronald Dworkin's article helps us to answer the question just posed. In fact, the critics of the Court have been engaged in restrained understatement. Mr. Dworkin proves this by his careful exposition and defense of current constitutional "reasoning." By his tortured justification of our highest court, he succeeds, against his intention, in showing that the Court is bankrupt.

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Professor Dworkin is no ordinary leftist law professor; he stands foremost among today's legal philosophers. His *Law's Empire* is the bible of those scholars who wish to substitute their own judgment for popular sovereignty. If he cannot justify the Court's way of doing business, no one can.

Mr. Dworkin considers the "equal protection" clause of the fourteenth amendment. Of course Mr. Dworkin does not consider the question, pressed by the outstanding American historian Forrest McDonald, whether the amendment was legally ratified. That much of a challenge to the federal government cannot exist for a moment in Professor Dworkin's "empire."

But let us give Mr. Dworkin his beloved clause. The government cannot deny to anyone "the equal protection of the laws." Does this not mean that the government cannot make groups specially privileged or disadvantaged by the laws it enacts? You might think so, if you reasoned in a commonsense way.

It transpires that common sense is the last thing the Court wants. In current jurisprudence, which Dworkin entirely supports, equal protection applies only to minorities that the Court favors. "The equal protection clause is violated...when [some group's] loss results from its special vulnerability to prejudice, hostility or stereotype, and its consequent diminished standing—its second-class citizenship in the political community" (p. 561).

How can this be? You may inquire: "does not the plain sense of the cause guarantee equal protection for everyone," not just minorities that arouse the Court's empathy? In response, Dworkin manifests his ingenuity as a major philosopher of law. "Equal" protection does not mean equal protection; this would be too simple. Quite the contrary, each person receives only a guarantee of being treated with "equal concern and respect" (p. 56). And this may require very unequal treatment indeed. Thus does equal protection become transformed into its opposite. Let us examine the formula once more: equal protection = equal concern and respect = unequal treatment. Simple is it not?

Suspicious readers may think I exaggerate; surely Dworkin cannot mean this by equal protection. Those who suspect me, of course without grounds, of bias against Mr. Dworkin may rest assured. Our author explains his view and that of the Court, with crystal clarity. "If a decision imposes serious disadvantages on what the Supreme Court has called a suspect class...then the decision is to be subject to 'strict scrutiny'.... But if those whom a law disadvantages do not form such a 'suspect class'—if they are only the members

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of a particular area—then that law is subject only to a 'relaxed scrutiny'; it is constitutional unless it can be demonstrated to serve no purpose or point at all" (p. 57).

"Strict scrutiny," the good professor tells us, is a legal term of art. If the Court subjects a law to strict scrutiny, it in practice never emerges intact. "Relaxed scrutiny," by contrast, lets anything through.

The matter is really quite straightforward. If a law has a bad effect on a favored minority, the Court will strike it down; if it disadvantages anyone else, all is well and good.

We have not yet exited Mr. Dworkin's constitutional maze. Some of the lower federal courts have not been fully enlightened. They think that strict scrutiny applies to any law having to do with race. If so, out goes affirmative action; remember, strict scrutiny is fatal.

As good Dworkinian liberals, we cannot have that, can we? The purpose of equal protection is to help, at whatever cost to anyone else, the groups Dworkin and the Court support. I do not propose to explain in detail the manner in which our author arrives at his foregone conclusion; affirmative action is constitutional and is not subject to strict scrutiny. Given his starting point, could anything be more certain?

Instead, let us note a crucial admission that Dworkin drops in passing. Supporters of affirmative action often defend it on grounds of justice. Blacks have in the past been grievously mistreated and are owed redress. Dworkin rejects this line of argument entirely: "Commentators' justifications suppose that affirmative action is necessary, as [Justice Antonin] Scalia put it, to 'make up' damage done to their race or class in the past, and he was right to point out that mistake in supposing that one race owes another compensation."

If a law has a bad effect on a favored minority, the Court will strike it down: if it disadvantages anyone else, all is well and good.

In other words, the "justification" for affirmative action is forward-looking. Dworkin and his friends want more blacks and other groups they like in top schools. Whites owe blacks nothing but they may be disadvantaged nevertheless. To treat whites this way shows "equal concern and respect." Therefore, affirmative action is constitutional. *Voilà!*

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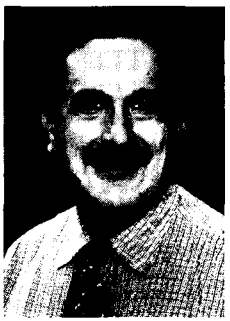

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